

R 061042Z NOV 08
FM AMCONSUL SURABAYA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0325
INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMCONSUL SURABAYA
AMEMBASSY DILI
AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY BEIJING
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON
AMEMBASSY SEOUL

UNCLAS SURABAYA 000129

STATE FOR R -U/S GLASSMAN, DRL - A/S KRAMER, EAP/PD -
RFERGUSON-AUGUSTUS, EAP/MTS, IIP/PUB - GCLACK, PA/OBS -
GSANTULLI, IIP/W, IIP/S - RADAMS, PA/FPC - SMOCTAGGART

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SURABAYA WELCOMES A NEW PRESIDENT IN EAST INDONESIA

REF: A) JAKARTA 1805, B) JAKARTA 1996

11. (U) Summary: Consulate General Surabaya welcomed over 100 guests to the CG's residence November 5 to observe live results of the U.S. Presidential Election. Local government officials, NGOs, prominent academics, students, and many members of the media attended the event. The CG, other Consulate staff, and guests gave live media interviews and discussed the election process and results with attendees. END SUMMARY.

All-American Celebration

12. (U) Some eager guests arrived an hour early and all received a welcome packet with candidate profiles, buttons, stickers, and a sample ballot. Visitors were eager to cast their votes and the ballot box became the focus of many media pictures, some of which appeared in local newspapers. Voter participation among attendees almost exceeded that of participation in the East Java Governor's election, held the previous day. Not surprisingly, Senator Obama, who lived for a time in Jakarta as a child and is extremely popular in Indonesia, came out ahead in the contest, although Senator McCain garnered some votes as well.

13. (U) Six television monitors, including a large projection screen, showed live results from various U.S. and international networks including CNN, Fox News, BBC, and Al Jazeera. Guests enjoyed traditional American foods that started with a breakfast menu of pancakes and hash browns and moved on to hamburgers straight off the grill with all the fixings for lunch. Invitations to the event described it as an open house, but most guests stayed for several hours and remained enthralled until both candidates had delivered their speeches.

Media Interest High

14. (U) Media interest in the campaign and the Consulate's Election Open House was intense. National and local television networks broadcast from the event and pictures of noted guests at the ballot box and the CG filling in a large electoral map were featured in newspapers. Surabaya's Public Affairs Officer did a live radio interview in Indonesian just after the results were announced. The CG and several guests were also interviewed by various media outlets. A number of attendees had participated in election outreach programs that the Consulate had been holding in the weeks leading up to Election Day. Many of these programs had also been highlighted by the media.

¶5. (U) In an interesting coincidence, East Java, Indonesia's second largest province with a population roughly equal to California's at over 35 million, held its governor's election on November 4. "Quick count" results suggest less than 1 percentage point separates the candidates. The final results are not expected for another week, creating concerns about potential fraud (Septel). Some guests noted with admiration how quickly U.S. results were tabulated, even for tight races in battleground states. Despite an overwhelming preference for Obama, a number of guests expressed admiration for McCain's concession speech. For many Indonesians, this was the first time they had been exposed to Senator McCain. After his speech, some attendees said they now understood why so many Americans supported him and how they wished politicians here could be as magnanimous in defeat.

¶6. (U) This campaign and Senator Obama's rise to prominence in the American political landscape has captivated the imaginations of large segments of Indonesian society. His ties to Indonesia and multi-ethnic heritage have resonated with people across the archipelago. Never before have Indonesians followed an overseas democratic process as closely and it has inspired them to contemplate all the possibilities inherent in a democratic form of government. Guests at the Consulate watched in wonder as scenes of jubilation in front of Obama's former elementary school in Jakarta were beamed via satellite around the world. A proud moment in American history is universally welcomed as a triumph of democracy in this developing democratic state.

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